THE LAST STRIKE AT OPHIR.

By Charles Howard Shinn.

Ophir was the most prosperous mining camp on the western slope of the Sierra, and Wash Bonner was the most prosperous miner it contained. His claim, the "Blue Juanita," was paying enormously, and Wash had become very popular for he gave away his money as fast as he made it. Wash was a tall, good humored Missourian, lean, light-haired and sleepy. No one gave him credit for much energy or ambition, and the accident by which he had stumbled upon his claim when the camp was first settled was told far and wide as a case of "fool luck."

It happened this way: The camp began as a placer camp, and all the "claims" along the stream or on the flat were taken up, when Wash, a tall greenhorn of a newcomer, drifted in without a dollar to his name, and stood watching the sail company of runaways from ships in San Francisco bay, as they took out their "ounce to the man," from the best washings in the camp.

"What are you lookin' at, young fellow?" said the captain of the company.

"Why don't you stake out a claim?"

"All taken," said Wash, slowly.

"Go up on the top of the hill by them oaks," said the man winking at his comrades. "More there than here."

Wash borrowed a pick, went to the place indicated, and in an hour developed the most famous mine of the district. It was a curious pocket mine in a loose, broken formation; and, though everyone rushed to the place and staked out the whole hillside, no other claim ever paid a tenth part as much as the "Blue Juniata."

In the course of time, as the region became settled and men with families came in, Wash fell in love with the pretty daughter of a farmer in the Sacramento valley. He reviewed the past, a hundred thousand dollars had come out of his mine, and he had nothing left to show for it. He resolved that if the girl would have him he would never waste another cent. He went to the claim, worked all day, struck a 'pocket' and took out more than a thousand dollars, the largest yield of a single day in the history of the mine. Then he quit work, went to the town, "spruced himself up," drove into the valley, called on the girl, proposed and was accepted.

"Jennie," said Wash, "you've got to take me, ef you want me, jest as ef I hadn't any mine, and wasn't worth a picayune."

"I do," said Jennie, "It's you I care for, Wash."

A month later they were married, and began housekeeping in a little house of white pine, built near the mine. Then Wash began the regular development of his claim.

For six months he kept up courage, though not a dollar had come from it all that time. They lived on what was left of the thousand dollars after the wedding expenses were taken out. Then, one day Wash said: "Jennie, the boys think the old mine is played out; but I don't. I'll never give it up while I live. I'll find a bigger pocket in that mountain side than any man ever yet struck in California."

He climbed the hill and began work on a tunnel which should strike the broken, gold-bearing ledges at a lower point than he had yet reached.

Months more passed over the heads of the miner and his wife. One after another their friends deserted them; their credit gave out and they lived on game, fish and berries, so that the little money they had could all be spent for blasting powder. Every morning at daybreak Wash, gaunt and silent, went to his work; every night at dark he stumbled home to his cabin.

"Jennie," he said, "I know there is gold there. We will find it soon. I never before worked a month in the old mine without taking out something. This deadlock has lasted more than a year. It can't last always. I will find the lead again, and then we will let the rest go and buy a farm in the valley and forget this fight."

She believed every word; for she was a loving, loyal woman, and she knew that this great, awkard Missourian was a man among thousands. The very boys in town hooted after him and called him crazy; but she knew better. Her family had once urged her to leave him and come home, but they never ventured to suggest it again. Old miners passing by looked at the claim and said there was no gold left. Men who had had thousands of dollars from her husband, and owed their entire fortunes to him, at last refused to give him credit for a sack of flour or a side of bacon.

"You stick by the mine, Wash; I'll stick by you," was all that Jennie said. She had never told her husband that she had gone to her brother, who was rich, and asked him for a little money to carry them through the winter.

"Not for that spendthrift Missourian to waste," was his answer. He can clerk in my store if he will give up his foolishness."

Wash's hair grew gray and thin. He stooped lower and lower. Deep lines were graven in his face, and his eyes became fierce and terrible. Men met him in the gulches trapping game, or down in the streams with his fish nets, and passed him by without a word. Prospectors, climbing over the hills, heard the sound of his pick as he toiled in his tunnel, and laughed him to scorn. "Because he found a few pockets he is boring right into the granite. Crazy as a loon and his wife as bad. Her relations have done everything to help them—offered them a farm and the best kind of a show down in the valley."

It was an afternoon in October. The saloonkeeper sat on the bench by his door, reading a newspaper. He heard a noise at the head of the street; the village boys were shouting "Here comes the crazy Missourian miner." Wash, ragged and miserable, came into sight, and after a moment's hesitation, spoke to him:

"Evening, Mr. Riley."

"I can't do anything for you."

"Mr. Riley, listen to me. I hain't a cent in the world. We've sold all our goods and worked in the mine together this month. Jennie held the drill while I druv it. I can't get a pound of powder, but the holes are all set in the face, ready. Something tells me that this time it will touch gold. I can feel it just ahead. I've felt it all along; but now it's right thar, within reach of one more blast. I tell you, Riley, I know it's thar."

"You're crazy, Wash."

"Riley, you've got money. Give me one keg of powder an' I'll make you a rich man. I'll give half we take out. You don't know how I've worked this year. I've hammered from daylight to dark, gone hungry and slept cold, an' fell down in a dead faint time and time over. Put your hand thar!" He seized the saloon-keeper's hand and held it on his breast. The man felt Wash's heart sway several inches, as if it had torn loose from its place, and its wild, loud throbbing was like the beating of a mighty engine. "Thar," said Wash, "you see I ain't for long. That mine's for my wife. She stayed with it and with me. I ought to have dropped it and put my pride down long ago, but now it's too late. Riley, will you let me have the powder?"

"No."

Wash looked at his old enemy and turned away.

No one in all that camp understood the proud, unyielding soul that had set itself to wrestle with nature and her secret. The afternoon wore on into night, and night into morning, and morning, noon and afternoon built up another day. Wash did not come back.

Some boys climbed the hill and went into the tunnel. There lay Wash, dead, at the end of the drift, his pick in his hand. He had gone back to break his own way into the treasury house, but his heart had burst in the midst of a giant stroke, and he had fallen across his own weapon. There his wife had found him, and she, too, weak and sick and broken-hearted, lay in a faint over his body.

Ophir Camp woke with a start to a dim sense of its crime. Tender hands carried Wash and his wife out of the tunnel and did all that could be done for the poor woman.

A dozen men went back into the tunnel from which they had taken the dead man, and looked at the place where his last faltering stroke had glanced on the flinty rock.

"Boys," said one, "I'll never forget that I told Wash he couldn't have any more powder, not if he died in his tunnel. We'll set off them last blast holes jest as he wanted; and then we'll bury him in here where he dropped."

There was plenty of blasting powder now to be had for the asking, and in a few minutes more the face of the drift was ready for the blast, the fires set and lighted, word had got around the camp and every man was gathered at the mouth of the tunnel. A few women were in the old cabin caring for the dying wife. A long silence followed the lighting of the fuses, and suddenly the dull nose of the shock and the fall of heavier masses of rock than usual startled the miners outside.

They ran into the tunnel with their lights. The blast had opened a wide path into an irregular cavern, gleaming with gold. Above, below and all sides was the shining precious metal. The last blast, for which Wash had struggled so bravely, had revealed a fortune. The excited miners rushed out again with a wild shout. A woman met them with a flushed and frightened face.

"How can you make such a noise?" she said. "The poor thing's gone, crying like a baby for her dead man."

The miners drew close together, ashamed and profoundly affected. After a little, a few of them went back to the tunnel, and secured Wash's pick-ax, which had been left leaning against the wall.

"We can't bury them here now," said one; "the mine will be worked again. They must lie on the hillside, where all his friends of twenty years ago are laid."

Wash had no relatives. His wife's brother came up and took possession of the claim which the miners had protected against all intruders. In a few weeks it became generally understood in the region that the wealth of the "Blue Juniata's last and greatest pock was estimated by conservative miners at a quarter of a million.

But from the day that Wash fell in his tunnel, a blight seemed to fall on the little camp at Ophir. Mine after mine gave out; miner after miner moved away. A land-slide swept off the cabin where Wash lived, and though as I have said, the "Blue Juniata" yielded all that was expected, and even more, and founded one of the great Pacific coast fortunes, none of its treasures brought happiness to those who worked it. To-day the camp is deserted, and its very name a memory.

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Poisoned from a Chicken.

A singular case of blood poisoning is reported from Nyack, N. Y. Ambrose Cells, a young man well known there, lost a favorite chicken, and being anxious to know the cause of the fowl's death he proceeded to dissect it. While cutting the chicken his knife slipped and wounded the hand of his wife, who was assisting him. The woman's hand soon after began swelling, as did also her entire arm and face, and soon she was in a terrible condition. Medical aid was called, and Mrs. Cells is considered out of danger.—Philadelphia Ledger.

The first annual dinner of the London Thirteen club was held at Anderton's hotel, the present headquarters of the club. The dinner was three times thirteen minutes late, to enter the dining room it was necessary to pass under a ladder, the knives and forks were all carefully crossed, there were six tables, each with thirteen diners, and—quite by accident, curiously enough—the number of ladies present was just thirteen. Despite all these numerically malign influences a very enjoyable evening was spent.

Citizen Train, now a citizen of one of Tacoma's suburbs, proposes to organize a company of 500 American editors and take them around the world in fifty days next fall, at $500 per head. As the champion globe trotter, the citizen thinks that he can outdo the best of book's guides.

Sunday-school Teacher—"Now, Johnie, tell me what took all the snap out of Sampson?"

Johnnie—"A home-made hair cut ma'am."—*Yonkers Statesman.*

In the Fishing Season.

Mrs. Brown—I had to cook that fish at once as I was afraid it wouldn't keep.

Brown—Geewhiz! I'll go right down to the market and give that man a piece of my mind.

Mrs. Brown—Hold on, my dear; it was the fish you caught yourself this afternoon.—Harper's Bazar.

He Lives in the West.

One George Thompson, of Iowa, who supposed that New Hampshire was a part of the United States, went out hunting while on a visit to a relative in that state, got lost in the woods and on the night of June 30 froze his ears and toes.—Detroit Free Press.

He Puzzled the Jeweler.

Jeweler—Want it set in a lace pin? It is an odd looking stone. Where did you get it?

Customer—It was left this morning by my iceman.—Jewelers' Circular.

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